

CHARLIE BAKER
Governor



KARYN POLITO
Lt. Governor

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CONTACT

Brendan Moss

brendan.c.moss@massmail.state.ma.us



Governor Baker Re-Files Legislation to Increase Penalties for Child Predators

Legislation toughens court system reviews, increases penalties for sexually dangerous individuals

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker re-filed legislation to strengthen penalties for child predators and reform the civil commitment process for sex offenders. First filed in June 2018, the legislation will require a full hearing by a court to resolve disputes over whether a sexually dangerous person should be released from custody.

Inadequacies in the current system were recently highlighted by the case of Wayne Chapman, an admitted and convicted repeat child rapist, who was found not sexually dangerous by two qualified examiners and was ordered to be released through a recent decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

“The case of Wayne Chapman proves that the Massachusetts’ criminal justice system is falling short when it comes to keeping serial child predators out of our communities and behind bars, and this bill is aimed to address this very concern,” **said Governor Charlie Baker**. “We look forward to working with the Legislature to pass our legislation, protect our children, and keep our neighborhoods safe by preventing the future release of extremely dangerous individuals convicted of heinous crimes.”

Last week, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court affirmed a Superior Court decision ordering Chapman’s release, ruling that the Commonwealth’s civil commitment statute does not permit a trial if two qualified examiners agree that the individual no longer remains sexually dangerous, even if other equally qualified experts disagree. The legislation filed by Governor Baker today would reform that statute so that any disagreement among experts will result in a trial at which a judge or jury can hear all the evidence about whether a person remains sexually dangerous and make a fully informed decision regarding release.

"It's vital that our court system treats crimes against children with the seriousness they deserve," **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** "By strengthening the review process for child predators, we can ensure that dangerous individuals remain off our streets and away from our children and communities."

The administration's legislation also increases the mandatory minimum penalty for rape of a child with force by a person previously convicted of sexual offenses to life without parole, and establishes a new child predator offense for rapes of multiple children with force with a mandatory penalty of life without parole.

"We need to act quickly to update to our laws to better protect public safety and support victims who deserve to be heard," **said Attorney General Maura Healey.** "This legislation makes meaningful changes to the process to prevent dangerous people from being released."

"Our court system needs the tools necessary to keep convicted serial predators like Wayne Chapman from hurting more defenseless children," **said Secretary of Public Safety and Security Thomas A. Turco.** "These individuals simply pose too great a threat to the most vulnerable members of our community to be given another chance to reoffend."

"Our office is always working to protect the public and exploring every possible way to do that, including making necessary changes in the law," **said Plymouth County District Attorney Timothy J. Cruz, president of the Massachusetts District Attorneys' Association.** "Governor Baker's bill would strengthen the penalties for child predators and reform the civil commitment process. We are all working together with a common goal, to keep our communities safe from repeat sex offenders. This bill will aid in that effort, and I urge the Legislature to move forward and pass it."

"There is no question that the safety and security of our children remains the number one priority of law enforcement," **said Chelsea Police Chief Brian Kyes, president of the Massachusetts Major City Chiefs of Police.** "Accordingly, we need safeguards to protect these children from serial rapists who reoffend after release. We reserve life in prison only for the most egregious offenders, and repeat child rapists are among them by any reasonable definition."

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